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- Jesscia: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart. We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon and teaching lesson. I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau, here with Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger. They're both professors of homiletics here at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. You can hear all about us in our introductory episode, but trust me, they are pretty good preachers. All right, let's get started. Peter, where are we in the church here?
- Peter: We are celebrating the sixth Sunday after the Epiphany as we continue to think about God revealing himself to this world in Christ.
- Jesscia: And what are the texts for this week, David?
- David: The texts are Jeremiah 17, 1 Corinthians 15, Luke 6, and Psalm 1.
- Jesscia: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about to determine who goes first this week. So the gospel reading is the Sermon on the Mount, and you think of Jesus with the crowds around Him listening to the longest sermon recorded in the New Testament. What's the best crowd concert you've ever been to?
- David: I've only been to four concerts in my life, so I don't have many to choose from.
- Peter: That may be more than me.
What was the best?
- David: I don't know. I'd say yes. I went and saw Yes a long time ago. I know! Gosh.
- Peter: That is a long time ago.
- David: They're dead! Everybody's dead that I listen to.
- Jesscia: Peter, what about you?
- Peter: I went to a Garth Brooks concert one time.
- David: Okay, there you go.
- Peter: But you just sit there and listen to a guy way off in the distance playing some songs everybody seems to know but me. It was fine. We're not big concert people.
- Jesscia: Alright, hey, Ben Folds, best crowd concert twice, so good. I guess yes compared to Garth Brooks. David, you win. You get to go first.
- David: We gave you a hard choice. Sorry about that. So yeah, you're right. I'm going with Luke. The Sermon on the Plain, I guess they call it in Luke, right?

Jesscia: That's different than a mount. Tell me what it is about.

David: It's just that he stood with them on a level place, right? So they often call the Sermon on the Plain to differentiate from the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, the Sermon on the Plain, and Luke.

Jesscia: But it's the same sermon, the Beatitudes.

David: Yes, it is. It is, but it's different. There's differences and that's kind of the interesting thing, right? So that in the Sermon on the Mount you have the Beatitudes, right? They're all blessings, right? Sermon on the Plain, we get a few woes.

Peter: The rest of the story.

David: Right, yeah. So there's a little, you know, there's subtle differences, right? And that's kind of one of the differences I think it would be helpful to explore. Jessica, if you could read through the text, but just read the first portion of the Blessed, Blessed, Blessed, Blessed, and then Woe, Woe, Woe, Woe.

Jesscia: Can you say, Woe, Woe, Woe, one more time?

David: That's the concert.
Yeah, yeah.

Jesscia: And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:
"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.
"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh
"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!
Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy,
for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.
So, there are the blessings and now the woes.
"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.
"Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.
"Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

"Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

David: Okay. We have four blessings and four woes, right? And they're the exact same.
Blessed are you who are poor. Woe to you who are rich.
Blessed are you who are hungry. Woe to you who are full.
Blessed are you who weep. Woe to you who laugh.
Blessed when people hate you. Woe to when people speak well of you.
And so they kind of correspond to one another, right? And so you've got these blessings and woes and they're oriented around wealth,

food, joy or pleasure and reputation. I mean, you think about the way in which Jesus, you know, this is the beginning of his ministry. He's gathering a group of disciples around him and what I see him doing is giving the lay of the land. And these are four qualities that are always going to be on our minds. I mean, if we were to look at Instagram photos, right, how many of them would have to do with food? I have a niece who's constantly taking pictures of whatever she's eating. You've got, you know, your reputation, photos that enhance your reputation. You've got what's joyful for you and you've got things that show, you know, your social status, the riches, right? And so you think about how those four factors, our social status, our food, our pleasures in life and our reputation, what could be some of the problems when you're interacting with those four things in your life?

Jesscia: They're not all bad.

David: Right.

Jesscia: Laughing is good.

David: Right.

Jesscia: Not being hungry is good. I want people to speak well of me, so why am I being woeed for that?

David: Right. Woeed is not like saying, you know, woeed to you who kill somebody, right, where you've got a really clear black or white, but your reputation is important. Food is important. Joy is important in life. Social status can be important. So there are things that we have to negotiate with. We have to kind of figure out how do we walk that path? So they're not clear evils, and yet they are things which can lead us astray. How could any one of those four things lead you astray from following Jesus?

Peter: Well, that's the pursuit that you're talking about, you know, what's really most important. You know, people have all these measures of how you can tell what's most important to you, you know, look at your checkbook or look at your calendar. You could say look at your feed or something like that. But these are the things that we really care about for good reason. They're important good things, but it's the good things that are the most likely candidates for idolatry. You're not going to idolize something that's hurtful to you. Right. You're going to idolize something that is good. So yeah, so that's what I find interesting about the way Luke has Jesus' Sermon on the Mount beginning. It's not simply a listing of blessings, which is what we have in Matthew. In Luke, we have both the blessings and the curses. And what I'm thinking for me as a way of preaching, I would think about using kind of an analogy about orienting you toward life in the kingdom. So you know, I

keep bees. And there's this interesting thing that happens with bees when they have, you know, they're At some point in their life, the worker bees are going to become foragers and they're going to go out and they're going to go probably two miles, as far as two miles away from the hive to get pollen, to get nectar, and to bring it back into the hive. But they don't just immediately fly away. They do what are called orientation flights. And so they will come out of the hive and they'll fly a little loop and then they'll be back at the entrance to the hive and then they'll fly a little bigger loop and back to the entrance to the hive and they'll keep doing that. And as they're doing it, they're kind of looking for landmarks in the landscape that help them figure out where the hive is so that when they fly out and they forage, they get pollen, they get honey, they always have a way to find their way home. And so I've got these bees, they're 14 days old, they do these orientation flights, and then they go away from the hive, they gather nectar, they gather pollen, but they always know how to find their way home. And so for me, Jesus is kind of giving an orientation flight to people who are going to become his disciples. He's giving them this broad overview of the world and they're going to be going out and they're going to be engaged in finding food, engaged in having joy in the created life that God has given them, engaged in hoping to have a good reputation, and engaged in social status and the goodness of material possessions and stewardship of those material possessions. These are not evil things, they're going to be engaged in them, but the beauty of this orientation flight is that they are aware how these things could go wrong. They are aware of the woe that could be present if they make these their idol, make these their greatest good. The beauty of the Beatitudes is that they're promising us, even when your flight for nectar has been unproductive, you can still find your way home because you're going to be blessed even without these earthly situations. That our earthly situations do not determine our relationship to God. That that's determined in Christ.

Peter: So I'm thinking about the sermon or the use of the Beatitudes here are both encouragement and warning.

David: Yeah, right.

Peter: They're encouraging those who are hungry, who are weeping, who are excluded, and saying blessed are you. And it's warning those who may be pursuing any of those things as kind of their concept, their orientation for life.

David: And investing everything in them. That your life is more than this. It then causes us to think about how do we, so Jesus provides these orientation flights for his disciples. How do we provide orientation flights for our kids?

Peter: Right.

David: How do we provide orientation flights for our members? You know, the world we live in is complex. There are pursuits that people have because it's part of being human. But how do we help our kids not use TikTok in a way that's going to damage the relationship to Christ? And I think it's kind of, it raises that question, what are ways in which we can safely orient the people God has entrusted into our care to what discipleship in the kingdom looks like?

Peter: I like the idea of orientation because there's not, you can't just try to give all this exact direction for every single situation.

David: Right.

Peter: But you can give them a view of life and what it means to follow Jesus in a way that allows them to connect some dots in their own lives.

David: Right, it's a lot of the connecting of the dots, right? Because when we're foraging for nectar or pollen, you're going to be going to very different places. You know, not everybody goes to the same place. You're going to be in different places, every place is going to have a danger. But you've got the big picture in hand, right? That the Lord is going to be with you, that it is his presence that is most important in the kingdom. And that you pursue these other things, but you pursue them with an understanding that there's a risk here. And that you don't want this to become your idol, but you want it to become a gift from the Lord.

Jesscia: If your image was going to be the bees' orientation flight, a nice children's message to go with that could be a very simple one about bees. Depending on how old the kids are, that usually come to your children's messages. But you could say, did you know that bumblebees, they fly away from the hive, but they always know the way to come back? And it's just like you and me, because we go out during our day and we do our stuff, but we always come back to God's word. We always come back to our home church where we can get ready to go back out again.

David: Yeah, I mean, you could actually start by saying it's so nice to see you again.

Jesscia: You've come back to your home.

David: You've come back to your home place.

Jesscia: Yeah, see, that would be great for kids.

Peter: I got to ask Dave, this is Luke's version of the beatitudes. And I'm curious what you say too about this, Jessica. It might be tempting for a preacher to get into kind of a Matthew does this, Luke

does that, kind of because Matthew's Sermon on the Mount is a little bit more familiar.

David: Right, we hear it every Saints Day, all Saints Day.

Peter: So to make a big deal of that, I'm curious if that helps this sermon because it acknowledges that people are familiar with Beatitudes in a different context, or if that's one of these kind of exegetical important details that can function as a distraction for the sermon. So would you just go full bore with this in Luke and not even worry about the Matthew version?

David: That's probably how I would do it. For me, the contrast to Matthew is what highlights the importance of recognizing that this one has woes, right? So if I'm thinking as a preacher, I look at these two texts, I know people are familiar with this one, but this one has something that they usually haven't heard before. So when I'm preaching on it, I want to kind of somehow build that in. But I agree with you. I mean, Jessica may differ on this, but for me, I'd be afraid of distracting them because in some people are like, well, I thought it was the Sermon on the Mount. You mean we have two different versions of it. Well, which one is true? And all those kinds of questions, which are not the place in the sermon to answer those, but that's what they're thinking the rest of the sermon. So I would probably just go open with the story about the bee orientation flights, talk about Jesus, the beginning of disciples in the ministry. He's giving them an orientation flight, how he's done that for us in Christ, and then move to how do we do that for our children and others, I think. But I don't know, Jessica, what do you think?

Jesscia: I agree with you. Do it in Bible study. Do it sometime when there's question and answer.

Peter: Yeah, maybe Bible class because those people are probably more familiar with the Beatitudes anyhow and they would benefit from that comparison.

Jesscia: Great. Thank you, David. Peter, what about you? What would you preach about?

Peter: Well, I would choose to preach on the epistle. And we've been looking at 1 Corinthians for a couple of weeks now, starting, I think it started back in 12, all the way up to 15. And it's just hard for me ever to pass up preaching on 1 Corinthians 15.

David: Oh, there's such a good text.

Peter: Because it's such an important text and it really usually only gets read, I think. I didn't check the lectionary. I think it's generally, it's often read as the epistle on Easter Sunday. So I would jump on that opportunity. What I like about

1 Corinthians 15 is the letter of 1 Corinthians goes into all the dysfunction and very specific troubles and it's very contextual, almost the whole letter, with the exception of maybe the first couple chapters. And then it comes out on the end here in chapter 15 with the foundation, kind of the universal basic truth. Paul begins 1 Corinthians 15 by saying, let me remind you of the gospel I preached to you. So once we've dealt with all these intricate, messed up problems in Corinth, Paul comes back to the resurrection as the foundation.

David: The full bore, too. I mean, it's the whole...

Peter: I used to tell people in our congregation, if you're going to memorize a chapter of the Bible, memorize 1 Corinthians 15.

David: Oh yeah.

Peter: It's so good. There's so much stuff. So I would suggest maybe, why don't we start just by reading, Jessica, if you would read verse 16 to 20.

Jessica: For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope, in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Peter: Okay. This summarizes these really important truths that if Christ hasn't risen, then I don't know what we're, we're totally lost. There's no point in anything we're doing here. And so it gets to kind of the foundational significance of the resurrection. Now when you, when you think about what Paul's doing in 1 Corinthians 15, you have to, I'm not sure if you do this in a sermon, but you have to notice that he's dealing with people who question the resurrection of the dead, period. And then if there's no resurrection of the dead, then Christ hasn't been raised and that gets it. So it's a kind of a very specific issue.

David: That's the foundational truth of their world view, right? That there is no resurrection.

Peter: There is no resurrection. And so that's a real problem for Christians because the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation. Now I'm not sure that that's the exact same problem we have today. You know, we have a weird blend of kind of a Gnostic, dualistic, people live after death.

David: Right. Yeah.

Peter: So I don't know if it's exactly the same issue that we have today. I'm not sure, especially for our hearers, many of our hearers come to church on Sunday morning because they believe Jesus rose from the dead. So I don't think you want to preach to your hearers as if they're people who question whether or

not there's a resurrection. What stood out to me as I was reading this was verse 19. I'm going to ask you to read that just verse 19 one more time, Jessica.

Jesscia: If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Peter: That little word only. Did you catch that? If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we're most to be pitied. Now to me, that suggests that there is a reason to have hope in this life because Paul's not saying if you have hope in this life instead of the resurrected life, you're most to be pitied. No, he's saying if we have hope in this life only, then you're most to be pitied. So there's a couple of things here that I would, and I haven't worked out exactly how I would put the sermon together, but I would want in a sermon on this text to acknowledge and emphasize and proclaim the resurrection of Jesus as the foundation of our faith and how that has a definite future orientation. We are looking forward to our resurrection. That's the heart of, I mean, that's what we're all, I mean, that's the end of it. That's the ultimate. That's the goal is the resurrection of the dead. But there's also hope in this life. Those who believe Jesus has risen from the dead, has conquered sin, has conquered death, has conquered the devil. There's actually hope in this life too. So I'd want to highlight both the future orientation toward hope in our resurrection and also call people to live in hope in light of God's present working here and now. I think there's that mindset sometimes among our people. I know when the Lord returns, things will all be great. And in the meantime, I think we have a problem of living in despair. I think there's enough problem and there's enough trouble in life. And we know it's coming. Jesus promised it. And we can't be kind of theologians of Gloria's if we just do everything right, everything will be perfect. But when we despair in this life for the sake of hope in the next life, we're missing an important part of the gospel, which is there is hope here and now too.

David: So what does that look like?

Peter: I'm glad you asked. This is where I find it interesting that this is paired with Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17. Because one of the things with Psalm 1 that's always kind of bothered me, look at what Psalm 1 says in verse 3. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Every time I read that, I think, but we don't prosper. You know, life falls apart and the church falls apart and my life falls apart and my body falls apart and I'm not prospering. And so there's a sense in which that Psalm kind of, it always rubs me a little bit. And then I read Jeremiah 17, which is not, which is very similar language but not as familiar. Look at verse 8. This is blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord. Verse 7, he's like a tree planted by water, sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when the heat comes, for its

leaves remain green, is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit. And so I look at what does it look like to live in hope, resurrection hope. The theme, I think, for this sermon would be something like resurrection hope. And I would want to proclaim loudly and clearly the promise of resurrection, life eternal, where we join Jesus, just kind of like in the raising of Lazarus. Yes, we will rise to the last day. But also, there is health and there is prospering and there is fruit being born in this life because Christ has risen from the dead. And so it's always going to be accompanied by the shadows. It's always going to be incomplete. It's always going to be broken. We don't put our confidence in everything getting right now. But there is fruit to be born in this life. And God does bear fruit. And he does fill us with faith and he does give us joy and he does forgive us and he does empower his people to live like they are the people of God in this tension, sinner, saint, now not yet kind of way. I mean, sometimes I wonder, I don't know about you guys, sometimes I wonder why more people don't just give up in life. And why people don't just say, this is too hard. You go from bad to worse and you're exhausted and you think, why even bother keeping going? And I think to that the resurrection has something to say. We have been baptized into his death and to his resurrection. So Paul says in verse 20 in this text, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. First fruits, that's begun already in our baptism. We have died and we have been raised with God in Christ. And I guess what I'm advocating for is a resilient and a defiant hope that we have as people who believe in the resurrection. It's not just for when the Lord returns. So I'm curious, Jessica, how would you receive a message that calls you and invites you to have hope? Would that resonate at all?

Jessica: I like that you are highlighting both because you can't have hope in this life if you don't have hope for the next life. Because then be pitied and this is all there is. So the end, right? So because I have hope in what's coming, now I can have hope in this life. I love reading the stories of Jesus healing people. It's like, oh, he does care if they can't walk. He does care that their daughter died. Because otherwise the hope to come is all we need. His grace is sufficient. But how nice to know that he's going to take care of us now, too. Because it still matters right now to us. That's good. I like that you're doing both.

Peter: My counseling professor when I was here at the seminary talked about pastors, but I think it applies to all Christians. He called us to be hope mongers. We bring hope to the most hopeless situations. And I think what I'm trying to advocate here for is the hope that we bring is not only in the end, but it breaks in here and now. And it gives new life to us so that we can endure the hardships, but endure them as Christians with hope and joy and peace.

Jesscia: Thanks, Peter. That's all for today. We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at ConcordiaTheology.org. Check it out. While you're there, you'll also find episodes of our other podcast, Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived. You can find more episodes of Lectionary Kickstart and Tangible and any of the major podcast apps. We've now added Amazon Music and Audible to that list. If you'd like to see the show continue, please subscribe for free. Share. Leave a review. I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau. Join us next week here at Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger will spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

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